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## FORUM



Student-led demonstration, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, February 4, 2015. Overpass Light Brigade, Joe Brusky photographer. Source: [overpasslightbrigade.org/love-light-for-uw-fight-the-cuts/](http://overpasslightbrigade.org/love-light-for-uw-fight-the-cuts/).

## Anthropologists in/of the neoliberal academy

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## Introduction

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The university, which has long remained one of the most conservative institutional models, has undergone dramatic transformations in recent years. This is true worldwide, notably due to reforms of the public sector that have intensified the commoditization of academic life, activities, roles and “products”. The modality and outcome of this process is not everywhere the same, as Sarah Green plainly puts it in her contribution to this Forum. In fact, this collection of short commentaries originated with the simple idea that while the neoliberalization of the university is a global trend that strongly impacts across different academic systems, it also has some specific, local features that influence the daily work and lives of students, researchers, teachers and administrators in particular ways. Even within a given national context shaped by the very same reforms and policies, we might observe specific articulations resulting from the various ways in which policy changes are introduced and managed, at times accommodated but sometimes resisted, subverted, or challenged by different subjects according to their visions of the university’s purpose and meaning in society as well as their own aspired roles. From this perspective, this Forum intends to explore how significant changes are actually occurring “on the ground”, as it were, by comparing the immediate experiences of colleagues working in a variety of academic roles and settings. Although some of the authors invited to participate in the Forum have produced significant expert contributions to the field of audit culture and education<sup>1</sup>, our intention is not to collect new research *per se* but instead, to gather fresh thoughts and insights by reflecting on current events and personal observations related to the changing institutional contexts in which different anthropologists are embedded.

In this Forum we present contributions related to university settings in various countries, including Australia and New Zealand, Romania, Denmark, Greece, Finland, Mexico, US, Holland, Spain, Canada and the UK. While this selection of cases obviously cannot offer a geographically comprehensive picture of what is happening at global le-

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1. This is an expanding field of research in anthropology, shaped by the influential essay of Cris Shore and Susan Wright (1999) and a seminal collection edited by Marilyn Strathern (2000).

vel, we seek to enlarge the sphere of critical and provocative conversations about emerging models of higher education across national contexts. In their introduction to a recent volume on neoliberalism in higher education, Boone Shear and Susan Brin Hyatt establish «the university as an important location of hegemonic struggle» (2015: 3), and explore how focused ethnographic research and analysis can help imagine more positive transformations going forward. We, too, aim to stimulate reflection on the changing role of the university today in concrete, empirical, ideally ethnographic terms. In assembling this set of commentaries, however, we asked our contributors for relatively informal, timely and accessible contributions that can make our perspectives and concerns from inside the academy easier to share with the general public. The immediate, thoughtful and even passionate responses we received within a very short timeframe have highlighted just how imperative a topic this is.

Our Forum opens up with a paper by Cris Shore and Sue Wright whose analysis frames and resonates with many other contributions here, and particularly with Jon Mitchell's account of the making of academic subjectivities. Drawing on years of systematic research within different university contexts, Shore and Wright make clear that the neoliberal model is not only transforming the role of the university in society, but also creating new kind of subjects whose practices and ethos are structured by an emerging entrepreneurial culture taking root at the heart of the academy. Dimtris Dalakoglou considers how neoliberal shifts promote entrepreneurial strategies and self-interested behaviour in academics. Exploring the etymology of idiocy, he insists it is crucial to recognize and challenge the actions of the many "idiots" now circulating in academia, that is, those simply acting according to selfish interests. Unfortunately, selfish or "idiotic" behaviour is often disguised and not always easy to identify as such, especially considering that the university is traditionally populated by "semi-scholars", as formulated by Arnold van Gennep in his inimitable, sardonic description of academic life (van Gennep 1911). Dalakoglou asks us to take sides, and reassert the moral ethos of common good.

In different ways, both Vintilă Mihăilescu for Romania and Jon Mitchell for UK suggest how difficult it is escaping from the audit regime and its trivial, apparently unquestionable truths. How could one argue against "teaching excellence" and "best practices", or to refuse to submit to "international standards"? However, as their contributions and others show, behind such apparently non-negotiable concepts and values, there exists considerable discretion. Paradoxically, assuming what is taken for granted and naturalized as signs of merit might ultimately produce nefarious social and political impacts to research and teaching, two essential activities of university professionals that are currently undergoing a process of unnecessary and unwanted separation. Yet Sarah Green reminds us that despite many haunting parallels and convergences across cases, we should remain attuned to the heterogeneity of neoliberal processes. Examining her experiences in the UK and Finland comparatively, she reflects that despite many negative impacts associated with new audit cultures, budget cuts, and moves toward privatiza-

tion in each case, there was no single, inevitable path toward a specific neoliberal model. Rather, there may be unexpected opportunities to shape the changing university in positive directions, particularly in national contexts where the public recognizes the value of higher education as a benefit to society.

The exploration of alternative moral frames for academic work running through these commentaries indeed suggests broad-based challenges to the ethos of neoliberalism. This gives some insight into emerging debates and conflicts around educational reform. Green's account of university downsizing in liberal Finland resonates with Tracey Heatherington's discussion of Wisconsin, but the latter emphasizes a clash in cultural values around education, and an evolving social mobilization to protect the core values of the university. Similarly, Gabriela Vargas-Cetina and Igor Ayora-Diaz consider the transformation of their own distinguished institution from a research-driven university into a "public service" university driven by market values. These deep changes to higher education are determined not only by the Mexican government, but also mandated by international agencies. They are taking place against an increasingly politicized backdrop of Oaxacan resistance to general educational reform. Where student mobilizations against educational reforms have taken place across Europe in response to austerity measures, these two cases illustrate the growing stakes for teachers and faculty.

The current transformation of the academic landscape, notably in UK and US, includes growing symbolic and financial privileges accorded to STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). As Shore and Wright, Heatherington, Narotzky, and Welch-Devine each show, this has serious consequences for what are sometimes perceived as less "relevant" or marginal disciplines in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. In this regard, the recent diminishing number of faculty in social anthropology in Italy is also telling (Palumbo 2013). Noelle Molé Liston, Meredith Welch-Devine, and Tracey Heatherington all discuss the problem of growing precarity from different subject positions in the US context. While Molé Liston and Welch-Devine occupy untenured positions outside of anthropology departments, Heatherington has witnessed the loss of tenure guarantees as well as challenges to academic freedom within a state university system. Both Welch-Devine and Heatherington also play complex dual roles as research faculty and administrators advocating for graduate programs that must survive in the context of the audit regime. In fact, the significance of neoliberal shifts for students remains an important concern for many of us. Susana Narotzky, Meredith Welch-Devine and Jaro Stacul offer three different national perspectives upon the re-making of academic subjectivities among students, who often have no choice but to dedicate more attention to working off campus than to their studies. Here we see how the increasing precarity of faculty and staff is matched by increasing precarity and debt for students, affecting the quality of their training in our discipline and consequently, the discipline itself.



It is our hope that this Forum will establish a platform to host and discuss future contributions on this theme and above all, to move together toward a coalition in favour of the university as we think it should be. In this, we draw inspiration from the colleagues who established the Overpass Light Brigade in Milwaukee, Wisconsin<sup>2</sup>. Since 2011, this alliance for creative activism has continued to champion public education and bring visibility to progressive causes, by lighting up signs above the highways and public spaces. Over the past five years they have forged a network that spans well beyond the state, and reminded us how powerful our words, ideas and collective actions can be. While current policy discourses may tend to reinforce the hegemony of neoliberalism, both Tim Ingold (2016) and Tracey Heatherington (this Forum) recognize expanding local movements to reclaim the model of the public university. If, as Thomas Docherty recently argued (2015: 1), «there is a war on the future of the university» worldwide, then it is essential that we become engaged, take sides, and decide actively what kind of university we do stand *for*.

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2. See <http://overpasslightbrigade.org>.

## Neoliberalisation and the “Death of the Public University”

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**ABSTRACT:** The advance of neoliberalism is often linked to what many authors describe as the “death of the public university”. Taking up this theme, we explore the idea of the “neoliberal university” as a model and its implications for academia. We argue that this model is having a transformative effect, not only the core values and distinctive purpose of the public university, but also on academic subjectivities of the professional ethos that has traditionally shaped academia.

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In February 2016 the Delhi University sociologist Satish Deshpande published an article in the *Indian Express* entitled “Death of the Public University”. Deshpande argues that India’s once robust public university system – one of the few vehicles for social mobility in the country – is fast being destroyed. He cites three main reasons for this: first, the rise of an increasingly detached Indian elite «who can afford first world fees, and who no longer care about Indian institutions»; second, the encroachment of private players into the lucrative Indian higher education market; and third, the steady erosion of governance structures that has fuelled *ad hocism*, incoherence and a chronic lack of care in policy-making. Academic autonomy, he says, has now become a «shield for the arbitrary authoritarianism of pliant academic administrators eager to implement every whim of the regime in power». He concludes «The net effect of all this is that the public university is shrinking in stature; instead of the confident, open and liberal institution that it once was, it is becoming insecure, narrow-minded and conservative» (2016).

Deshpande was writing about India, yet his criticisms could equally be applied to England, Chile, Australia or New Zealand. These countries have also witnessed the opening up of higher education to private providers, the complicity of politicians in dismantling the structures of governance that previously guaranteed autonomy and academic freedom, and the domination of once self-governing institutions by a bloated administrative caste of senior managers for whom higher education is to be treated as a business, much like any other commercial enterprise. These developments are the cumulative outcome of a steady series of reforms, initiated during the 1980s by successive neoliberal-inspired governments, which have sought to make public universities more economic by rendering them more “responsive” to markets, commercial interests and private providers. Prompted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD) and other international agencies, many governments in the 1990s embraced the idea that the future of their countries lay in a “global knowledge economy”. To these ends they set about transforming higher education into the engine for producing the knowledge, skills and graduates to generate the intellectual property and innovative products that would make their countries more globally competitive. These reforms were premised on the idea of turning universities into autonomous and entrepreneurial “knowledge organizations” by promoting competition, opening them up to private investors, making educational services contribute to economic competitiveness, and enabling individuals to maximize their skills in global labour markets.

As Deshpande shows for India, however, these reforms are contradictory and often produce chaos and corruption rather than efficiency and effectiveness. They are also re-defining boundaries of the university as its core values and distinctive purpose rub up against those predatory market forces, or what Slaughter and Leslie (1997) termed “academic capitalism”. Recasting public universities as transnational business corporations introduces new risks and market disciplines. Universities now face growing pressure to produce “excellence”, deliver quality research and innovative teaching, improve their world rankings, forge business links, and attract elite, fee-paying students. Many are buckling under the strain and increasingly struggle to maintain their traditional mandate to be “inclusive”, foster social cohesion, improve social mobility, and challenges received wisdom – let alone improve their records on gender, diversity and equality.

To what extent can we explain these trends in terms of “neoliberalism” or the rise of the “neoliberal university model”? Neoliberalism is a problematic concept. Excessive use of the term as a portmanteau for explaining everything that is wrong with contemporary capitalist societies has rendered it an empty signifier devoid of analytical value. As a noun, it suggests something universal and ascribes uniformity and coherence to an assemblage of processes and practices that are far from uniform, consistent or coherent. Like Peck and Tickell (2002: 463), therefore, we prefer to use the term “neoliberalisation” as it highlights the multi-faceted and continually changing set of process associated with neoliberal reform agendas, which assume different forms in different countries. That said, these reforms usually bear close “family resemblances”, to paraphrase Wittgenstein. These include an emphasis on creating an institutional framework that promotes competition, entrepreneurship, commercialisation, profit making and “private good” research and the prevalence of a metanarrative about the importance of markets for promoting the virtues of freedom, choice and prosperity. In Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere this narrative has typically been framed as taking an “investment approach” to higher education, one that recasts public spending on education in the short term and instrumental language of “return on investment”. This philosophy is also epitomised in the withdrawal of government funding for the arts and humanities and corresponding emphasis now placed on promoting the supposedly more “economically relevant” fields of Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Medicine (the STEM



subjects). The name of the game is now about generating new income streams – through “export education”, forging partnerships with business, commercialising university IP, leasing or selling university infrastructure, and developing spin-out companies. These have now become normalised and naturalised features of academia. In the new university, what “counts” are those things that can be “counted”, quantified and translated as financial returns to the institution. As one Danish minister summed it up, the aim is speed up the translation of research from “idea to invoice”.

Few countries better illustrate this than Britain, whose Conservative government has gone further than most in its attempt to open universities up to the disciplines of the market and the predatory interests of private capital. Not only are students in universities in England and Wales now charged some of the highest tuition fees in the world (for which most are forced to take on massive levels of personal debt), but the universities themselves are increasingly run as if they are for-profit businesses, chasing market share and preoccupied with advancing up the league tables of world rankings – which have become not only proxies for quality and social capital but also the basis of their credit rating (Wright, Shore 2017). Academics joke (somewhat nervously) that Britain’s leading universities are at risk of becoming financial conglomerates with a side-line in providing educational services.

It would be hard to exaggerate the effect of all these processes on the culture of academia. Just as the mission of the public university is being transformed, so too are academic subjectivities and the nature of academic work. Academics are increasingly required to become more “entrepreneurial”. Indeed, their “performance” is now typically measured in terms of quantifiable output targets to which financial numbers as well as publications in star-rated journals are attached. One in six British universities have imposed targets quantifying the amount of external grant income each individual academic is expected to raise for their institution (Jump 2015). The casualization of the workforce is another visible manifestations of this transformation. In Britain, 54% of academics and 49% of all academic teaching staff are now on casualised and insecure contracts (UCU 2016). This is still far below the US, where even by 2005 over two thirds of all academic labour force were precarious (Kalleberg 2009: 9). This is a rising trend, and not just in Britain.

The British government’s White Paper (BIS 2016), *Success as a Knowledge Economy*, takes these trends even further promising a fundamental redrawing of the relationship between universities, the state, students and research. Its main proposal is to open up British higher education to greater competition from private, for-profit providers by making it easier for new entrants into the “higher education market” to acquire degree awarding powers (“DAPs”). The Minister of State for universities and science justifies this on the grounds that it will provide more choice, competition and flexibility for students as consumers.

There are several business models for extracting profit from publicly funded universities (Wright 2016). These proposals enable private providers to access taxpayer-funded student fees in a business model that has already proved enormously profitable. One private provider grew from 496 students in 2010 to 3,366 students in 2012 with a fee income from public-backed loans totaling £11 million in 2012–2013 – more than any other private provider and more than the London School of Economics (Morgan 2014). Others seek to keep the public university as a carapace that protects its favorable tax and charitable status, and within it develop a “special services vehicle” to run all its functions. Whereas a public university cannot distribute profits, private interests can invest in a “special services vehicle” and extract an unlimited fee.

Another model is to “unbundle” the university’s functions, competences and assets so that these can be re-bundled by external private providers. In other industries, this is usually termed “asset stripping”. As with the utilities, trains and roads, the vultures of private capital are hovering. If the bill is passed, we can expect to see a feeding frenzy as some universities go bankrupt, others are taken over by financial conglomerates, and a plethora of small fly-by-night providers seek to capture the rents provided by the government’s student loan guarantee scheme.

One of the main casualties of this process is the ethos that previously sustained the traditional public university. Collegiality and professional trust are fast being replaced by competition, surveillance and managerialism. These are defining features of what we have elsewhere termed the rise of “audit culture” in higher education. More importantly, neoliberalisation has produced an erosion of academic freedom and the substitution of the idea of higher education as a public good with the notion that a university degree is a private investment in one’s personal career. Unfortunately for those facing a future of debt with a shrinking job market, that “investment” looks increasingly unlikely to deliver the promised returns.

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## The double bind of audit culture in Romania

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**ABSTRACT:** The paper focuses on the implementation of audit culture in the post-communist Romanian academic field, using a neo-institutionalist approach. The case of academic competition between anthropology and ethnology is scrutinized in order to illustrate the double standards, nationally and globally oriented, of the quantitative metrics promoted by state institutions.

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### *The brave new post-communist world*

“Transition” in post-communist countries was essentially a transfer of property and a reframing of the main institutions of the state according to good (western capitalist) practices. In the academic field, this institutional re-building was a kind of wishful shortcut of the “new management” trend which in Occident produced the «audit society» (e.g. Power 1997) – or what anthropologists prefer to call «audit culture» (e.g. Strathern 2000). A neo-institutional approach to this process can also be used in as far as it started to speak about «formal structure as myth and ceremony» forty years ago (Meyer, Rowan 1977), it devoted a lot of research on the educational field (e.g. Meyer *et al.* 1981), and also coined some concepts that fit into the description of early stages of neo-liberal restructuring of the academic field across the world (Schriewer 2009) we may find in post-communist Romania too. In this respect, one may identify a «coercive isomorphism» (i.e. a mechanism of isomorphism rooted in «political influence and the problem of legitimacy» – DiMaggio, Powell 1983) imposed by EU standards and regulations, later on internalized by the state and promoted at national level as a reformist ideology. «Rationalized myths» about what constitutes a proper organization (a central idea of neo-institutionalism, what Power described as «rituals of verification» and Marilyn Strathern referred to as such in her *Introduction* to the edited volume on «Audit culture») became an “ethical” must in the struggle to overcome “communist mentality”. In Stratherns’ terms of a policy-audit-ethics triad, ethics came first – but it was mainly ideology.

### *Audit culture is coming to Romania*

In practical terms, this meant that some mimetic standards of “quality” had to be taken over from Western countries and imposed to academia, not as much for their own sake but rather in order to de-legitimize and thus get rid of the “old guys”, presumed

not to qualify according to these “real” meritocratic standards. A selection of audit culture means and rules of the game was thus instrumented as “audit cleansing” in an ought-to-be reformatted academic field. Joining the exquisite club of the Bologna process offered a prestigious frame of references and gave an impetus to this trend. In order to make it easier and more “objective”, quality control was in fact only quantitative, i.e. pure metrics, the same for all and everywhere. Even if asking for high impact of research, funding is still based only on the author(s)’ impact indexes (e.g. Hirsch) prior to the research project. As noted by Meyer forty years ago, this kind of practice «provides *legitimacy* rather than improves *performance*» (Meyer, Rowan 1977). And legitimacy is further used for accessing resources (positions, grants etc.)

«The impact agenda appears to assume that impact is by definition a good thing» (Mitchell 2014). Relying on this assumption, governmental institutions are authorized to decide who is to be included and who should be excluded from the redistribution of resources. Thus, «formalized accountability» (Power 1997) just «served to transform a political discourse into an essentially technical issue» (D’Ascanio 2014: 155). Behind it, power games go on. Thus, in the case of the Romanian academic field, “universal” rational criteria of value and legitimacy changed with the change of governments, ministers and groups of interest. On one side, Romania joined the European club of isomorphism<sup>1</sup> and shared audit ritualization, but on the other side, inner «decoupling» (DiMaggio, Powell 1983) and cluster isomorphism are huge: networks of power and interest compete for the most profitable taken-for-granted form of audit.

The post-communist reframing of the academic fields of ethnology and anthropology may illustrate this dynamic.

### *The ethnology/anthropology divide...*

Following Stocking’s distinction (Stocking 1984), we may say that «diffuse ethnology» in Romania (Mihăilescu 2007), institutionally divided in ethnography and folklore, was entirely a «nation-building ethnology», deeply involved in the historical process of nation building; in recent parlance, we may say that it had a huge “impact factor”. On the other side, socio-cultural anthropology in the Western «empire-building ethnology» tradition was (almost) lacking in Romania till the fall of communism.

Being compromised to some extent by their implication in national communism, folk studies stepped back from the main academic scene just after the fall of communism, but recovered a decade later under the new brand of ethnology, and its association (The Romanian Association of Ethnological Sciences – ASER) was (re)launched in 2005. During all this time, even if losing power, the field kept its institutions and people. Most of the scholars regrouped, however, around the Romanian Academy, which

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1. As noted by Meyer in 1981, «peripheral nations are far more isomorphic – in administrative form and economic pattern – than any theory of the world system of economy division of labor would lead one to expect» (in DiMaggio, Powell 1983: 152).

sustains both their knowledge production and legitimacy as promoters of the “real traditions” of the nation – an increasing state and public demand due to growing nationalist movements.

On the other side, lacking an autochthonous model and having to build itself from scratch, post-communist socio-cultural anthropology had to take over the western status and brand, and professionalize according to them. Even if a national association (The Society of Social and Cultural Anthropology – SASC) started in 1990, anthropology was lacking both people and institutions. Emerging anthropologists managed to take some strongholds mainly in universities, but have to look for their legitimacy abroad via international publications and conferences; there is not yet a real demand for anthropology in Romania.

The two academic fields do not communicate and «dissident» ethnologists, eventually embracing “anthropological approaches”, are not welcomed in the anthropological club. The profile of the two professional fields is striking different, as illustrated in the Table below:

	Members	Mean age	Affiliation	Publications		
				In Rom.	Foreign lang./Ro.	Abroad
SASC	96	36	Universities Doc and post-doc	36%	23%	41%
ASER	107	56	Folklore centers, Museums, Colleges	84%	10%	6%

In their competition for resources, (younger) anthropologists need at any price international audit culture standards in order to get their legitimacy on a broader academic market (e.g. two thirds of them are publishing abroad or in English edited Romanian journals). On the contrary, (elder) ethnologists are seeking for more nationally-rooted “quality control” and “impact” and fight for adapting international standards to local “real” needs (e.g. only 6% of them are publishing abroad, mainly in neighboring countries).

### *The double bind of audit culture*

Audit culture myths and practices are an ideological must in Romania – but also in other “emerging economies” and/or “weak states” seeking for political reasons to line the neo-liberal global frame. But in doing so, the “audit culture kit” may changes according to national, local and/or institutional interests, sometimes favoring some categories of people, sometimes other. The new management of the university X, for instance, introduced some years ago a radical kit, taking over British standards. It was intended to move out “the old guys” and make room for younger, western trained scholars. The first goal was achieved, but the quality standards were too high for the young



scholars, unable yet to have a high “impact index”. The only ones to benefit were thus the leaders of this “reform”. With the next management, the quality kit became less exigent. But thus everybody could rank very high, so that the western publications of the higher-performing scholars lost their competitive advantage.

The dilemma around audit culture in such a context may be roughly phrased as follows: commitment to audit culture makes you its prisoner, but rejecting it makes you a loser. Adopting international academic audit standards helped the new generation of anthropologists to take advantage over some representatives of the older generation of less competent professionals, but put a strong pressure on their intellectual achievements. Rejecting such «rituals of verification» and fighting to adapt them to their own competences and interests, ethnologists gained a relative professional autonomy, but at the price of parochialism. In both cases, the production of knowledge is failing...

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## The universities of Manchester and Helsinki: Different paths

**Sarah GREEN**

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**ABSTRACT:** Comparing the experience of neoliberal reform at the Universities of Manchester and Helsinki shows that not all forms of neoliberalization are the same, despite the similarities in structural changes. In this case, the key difference has to do with the the social value attached to the content of scholarship, and to what universities do. In Manchester, the reforms were in the name of trying to achieve excellence, full stop; in Helsinki, the reforms were in the name of trying to achieve excellence *for a reason*: to better serve scholarship and the social good. This difference suggests that there is nothing inevitable about neoliberal reform: the outcome is contingent, and that generates hope.

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Not all neoliberal reforms are the same: that is the key lesson I have learned by working both in the Universities of Manchester and Helsinki in recently years.

In 2015, I was asked by the Head of Social Research at the University of Helsinki to give a talk for a Finnish audience about the UK's concept of "Impact" in the Research Excellence Framework 2014 (REF). I had moved to Helsinki in 2012. Keijo Rahkonen, the head of Social Research, said that he thought an audit of "research impact" might be introduced in Finland, and it would be good to compare the British experience.

At the time, there was a sense within the University of Helsinki that the university structure had been becoming neoliberal since 2010. That was the year the Finnish Government passed the new University Law which, people told me, "privatised" the universities. Coming from the UK, it seemed to me like a very mild form of privatization: all students still attended university for free (even overseas students); Finnish students still received grants from the government on which to live; and the government still paid almost all the costs of running universities. What had changed was that universities now managed their own budgets, were responsible for their own buildings, staff were no longer civil servants, academic tenure no longer existed, and a part of people's salaries would be assessed by performance.

I had arrived at Helsinki after 17 years of being employed by the University of Manchester, which had been pursuing a strong and explicitly neoliberal path since 2004, when Alan Gilbert became its Vice Chancellor and (at his request) the university's President as well. Gilbert had come from Australia, and had attempted, but failed, to create a fully privatised section of the University of Melbourne while he was there<sup>1</sup>.

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1. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan\\_Gilbert\\_\(Australian\\_academic\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Gilbert_(Australian_academic))

The University of Helsinki felt nothing like the kind of neoliberalism I had experienced under Gilbert's leadership at Manchester. The staff had been subjected to every kind of audit – teaching audits, research audits, even admin audits; every part of our work had been business-process re-engineered, so that everything we did was assessed for levels of successful, efficient, and timely performance. Students had to provide so much feedback about their lecturers' performance, and so frequently, that they were becoming tired of it. The amount of money spent on rebranding the university appeared to be the equivalent of the costs of running a small department. Many of us were put in newly built buildings that had open plan designs and little bookshelf space, apparently intended to increase interaction and transparency. Many of the staff and students believed it was actually to save money, and to increase surveillance.

The University of Manchester – or at least the School of Social Sciences in which I worked (nobody really knew what happened in other schools) - also introduced a variety of monetary targets, calculating annual "contributions" per discipline. "Contribution" was the word used to mean clear profit, after all the costs of employment, buildings, secretarial support, equipment, and so on, had been deducted. Even when disciplines were making a profit, if the average profit made by each member of staff was not meeting the target, that counted as failure. For the first time in my academic career, I began to become aware of the costs of teaching students, as the relationship between the time spent with students against the money they earned for the university was made explicit. Apparently, we should not give students more time than they are worth; but at the same time, we were exhorted to always answer students' emails and mark their work thoroughly and on time, because the students need to say they are satisfied with our service to them. There was also constant, endless, reorganization of administration structures and systems, and constant renaming of disciplinary units and attempts to merge them with others.

Things moved so far away from what we had understood higher education to be that many of us wondered how things had ever got to that stage with so few expressions of alarm about the systematic breaking down of what many of us saw as the essential basis for scholarship: the classic Humboldt model of the nurturing of a community of peers whose commitment was based on the idea of scholarship as a vocation rather than a job; whose work would be shared freely with other scholars so that it could be tested, critiqued and built upon by others; and in which teaching was a means to encourage young people to learn how to think, not what to think. All of that began to feel and sound faintly naïve, but the precise moment when it became so was unclear.

Despite all this, Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester remained one of the best anthropology units in the UK, and I thoroughly enjoyed working within that research environment and I still miss my colleagues. Yet that was despite the university's reforms, not because of them. Of course, there were some positive changes: nobody gave the same lectures for thirty years anymore; marking of exams became much more rigorous, so there was a reduction of gender and ethnicity bias; and PhD

students were managing to finish their doctorates on time more often than not. Of course the arrangements in the pre-reform era needed improvement, and many of those improvements have now been made; but I am not convinced that turning the University of Manchester into a neoliberal industrial site was the best way to make those improvements. I am certain it was not the only way to make them.

So when I arrived in Helsinki in 2012, the Finnish neoliberal experiment there felt to me like it had either hardly begun or was something completely different from what I had experienced in the UK. By 2015, when I was asked to present a paper on “the impact of Impact” on university research environments, I had concluded it was indeed something different. On the surface, the University of Helsinki might appear to be going down the same path: social sciences was moved to another building, much of which is open plan; the new rector changed the university’s statutes so as to centralise power to himself and would take increasing control over the appointment of deans and heads of department; the need to meet targets has been increasingly emphasised; and the complete reorganization of the administration and degree structures have been implemented at such speed over the last year that people have hardly had time to catch their breath.

That last set of changes coincided with a newly elected national government that radically cut the budgets of Finnish universities, and the University of Helsinki’s budget in particular. The drop in income was so big, the university’s rector said, that he had no choice but to downsize the university. This was despite the fact that the university made a hefty profit in 2015. By the time the paper I presented in 2015 was published, less than a year after I presented it (Green 2016), more than 500 staff had been laid off, including the administrator of Social and Cultural Anthropology, who had worked for the discipline for over twenty years. Most of these staff were administrative employees, but there were also a few academic staff, including full professors, who lost their jobs. Nothing that dramatic had ever occurred in one fell swoop at the University of Manchester. The entire staff at the University of Helsinki was in a state of shock about it by the time the summer recess arrived in 2016.

Yet it would be a serious error to assume that there is anything either inevitable, or inevitably the same, in the way such reforms have been implemented in Manchester and Helsinki. Despite the structural similarities of the reforms, there is something distinctly different about the value and significance of universities being expressed at Helsinki, from all sides of the debate, both those in favour of the reforms and those against. Of course the official rhetoric speaks of excellence, of trying to climb up international league tables, of the need to win ever more research money. Yet there is still an unwavering commitment to scholarship as an end in itself at Helsinki; more importantly, there appears to be a wider popular commitment to the idea that higher education is the means by which more equal opportunities are achieved in Finland. And universities are still also widely seen as a major source of attempting to do good for society (indeed, that is still written into the mission statement of the University of Helsinki).

What has happened at Helsinki over the last year, both in terms of layoffs and in terms of structural change, has shaken everyone to the core, and nobody knows, as yet, what the outcome will be. And that uncertainty provides a space for intervention. What appears fairly certain is that it will not be the same path as Manchester has taken. The Finnish university system has the opportunity, and the values, to take its own route to reform, and I am hoping to be there to help that happen.

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## Education and neoliberalism in Yucatan, Mexico

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**ABSTRACT:** Under neoliberalism, at least in Mexico, education has been recast as a service that is to be sold for money, and not as a right of all Mexicans. The economy itself is now seen as a services economy, where everything is expected to make money. Here we reflect on some of the implications of current education reforms on our work at the Autonomous University of Yucatan.

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On June 19 of 2016 in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, armed soldiers fired their weapons against a group of teachers who were protesting against the “education reform” ordered by Mexico’s national government. According to CNN and other international agencies, eight persons died, while 53 civilians and 55 policemen were injured<sup>1</sup>. In the aftermath, officials from Mexico’s National Security Commission said that the police had not fired because they were not carrying guns, and all the videos and photos published by the international press were doctored. Only after the national and international press distributed widely their videos of the shootings did the authorities finally accepted that the Mexican police had fired and caused fatalities<sup>2</sup>.

The teachers were striking against the so-called “education reform”, which is in fact an administrative reform of the National System of Education. Until 2011, elementary school teachers attended Escuelas Normales (School for Teachers) for four years after High School in order to become eligible to compete for jobs in the National System of Education schools. These are public elementary schools, and teachers are usually free to develop their own take on the national curriculum, as long as they also teach the basic contents required by the Secretary of Education. Escuelas Normales are known for being politically combative, since the teachers at elementary schools generally work closely with parents and families, and are aware of local problems and needs. Also, in Indigenous areas, the teachers use the local language to teach children until grade four, switching their students’ language requirement to Spanish in grades five and six.

Upon becoming President of Mexico, in December of 2012, Enrique Peña Nieto announced an Education Reform that, according to his government, would make Mexican education internationally competitive, by increasing the international standing of

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1. [edition.cnn.com/2016/06/20/americas/oaxaca-mexico-clashes/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2016/06/20/americas/oaxaca-mexico-clashes/index.html) (accessed on 15 July 2016).

2. [www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36572423](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36572423) (accessed on 15 July 2016).



Mexico on international indexes such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This was to be done through a major overhaul of the national education system. In practice, judging from what the teachers have publically declared during the protests, and from what we know from teachers in Yucatan, this meant that all teachers would take an exam, and if they failed it, they would lose their jobs. The requirement of graduating from an Escuela Normal (Teaching School) was removed; according to the new regulations anyone can take the exam and, if they pass it, become a teacher at an elementary school of the National System of Education. The main target seems to be the teachers' national trade union, one of the strongest in the country because it has members in all Mexican states. Judging from the news, and also from the comments of teachers on posts to news about the protests, many teachers in Mexico seem to have signed these documents and then taken the exam, even if they saw this as signing away their job security and their workers' rights and giving up on their union. In states like Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerrero, three of the poorest states of Mexico, teachers have been publicly protesting against this reform, not only because it takes away their job security but also because the authorities may use the exam to censure politically-engaged teachers by firing them immediately. In the aftermath of the killings of teachers and bystanders in Oaxaca, protests are now taking place in all of Mexico.

Yucatan is relatively far away from Oaxaca (1160 Km) and it takes 18 hours and 39 minutes to travel between Merida and the City of Oaxaca by bus. At the Autonomous University of Yucatan (UADY) each year we get only a few students who graduated from Oaxacan high schools, but we do share many of the problems now affecting Oaxacan elementary school teachers and Oaxacan universities, because of the larger context of neoliberal economics, Mexican-style. UADY is known for its high quality programs. Between 2000 and 2011 it used to be among the five top public universities of the Mexican Republic. At this point, however, our University is in the process of becoming an institution less attuned to international research and more attuned to the requirements of a general workforce in a service economy. The neoliberal doctrine of education as a service to potential industry and service workers has affected UADY in at least the following ways:

1. The drive toward professors' demonstrable productivity. Since the 1990s, professors in all public and many private universities across Mexico have been asked to document every single activity they perform. Paper certificates are issued for each single activity. Organizing a seminar, putting together a syllabus, giving a paper, and even having been an employee of the University all need to be certified by an actual document, which at UADY used to be submitted to a committee at the end of each year as a pile of papers, and since 2014 have to be scanned and uploaded to a platform into the appropriate slots, according to UADY's program of Professor productivity. While in the past professors' productivity used to be tied mainly to money incentives, now we are increasingly moving toward a punitive regime, where everyone has to report to an ever-increasing number of accounting agencies and their respective platforms, lest we lose

employment-related rights. We have been advised that in a not-so-far-away future tenure will disappear, because it is too costly, and most teaching will be compensated according to professors' productivity indexes.

2. The exponential growth of administrative positions, relative to professors. In 2015 our incoming Rector (the highest authority in Mexican universities) calculated that we were reaching a proportion of 3 administration positions per each tenured academic. He saw this as a positive development.

3. The transformation of our programs from research-driven speciality programs (anthropology, archaeology, history, Latin American literature, social communications and tourism, which are all part of the Anthropological Sciences Faculty) into general education programs that will help our graduates find a job not necessarily related to a university education. Until 2010, our graduates were expected to have mastered at least some research methods and techniques that would help them to get a job as research assistants, or in places where first-hand knowledge of local problems was needed, or would make it possible for them to pursue postgraduate degrees. For several years now, however, students who passed the university's entry exam but did not make it into the sciences, engineering, medical or accounting careers, which are the ones most in demand, are transferred to those programs that did not fill up their maximum quota of entry students. At this point, in the social sciences and humanities we have to teach many students who are not interested in what we are teaching nor do they want to finish an anthropology degree; the only reason they come to our classes is to have the right to take the entry exam again each year and try to enter the other Faculties. We are babysitting an increasing number of disgruntled and disinterested students. In the meantime, the social sciences and the humanities are regularly derided as bad career options and economic cul-de-sacs by the parents of our students and by the general public.

4. We are now considered a public service university and not a research university. International agencies, including the World Bank, advised the Mexican government that public universities, especially outside central Mexico, should not dedicate their resources to research but rather to general education. While in the recent past in Yucatan the public university was only the top among a possible number of institutions students could attend, according to their scores on the national post-high school exam, our university is in the process of becoming a general studies institution. As we are asked to increase the number of our students and decrease the complexity of our courses, at UADY's Faculty of Anthropological Sciences we are finding it harder to compete with other study options for the incoming student generations. In the meantime, UADY does not have the installations nor the personnel to admit more hundreds of students. It is a no-win situation for the professors: We have to make our courses easier to follow and become a general studies option, we still do not fill the student entry quotas expected by authorities, and we are still expected to carry out a regular research and teaching load because of the increased requirements in "professor productivity".

5. It is increasingly difficult to teach the incoming students because they are so poorly prepared. This relates to the teachers' protests in Oaxaca and elsewhere, as education has been the political target of successive Mexican governments: world history, Greek and Latin etymology, general philosophy and other subjects important for an education in the social sciences have been either reduced or completely removed from the pre-university curriculum. At the beginning of the twenty-first century we could expect students to have some notions of the social sciences and to be able to understand some concepts from grammar or linguistics, so that they could be taught how to write essays in our disciplines. Today, their reading and writing skills are very poor. We are in the process of revising the requirements of our courses, because they seem unable to cope with the previous amount of written papers.

We feel that the quality of the education we can offer is suffering, and have no way of making things improve. Neoliberalism, unfortunately, has resulted in similar developments in many countries where education is suffering under the new creed of wholesale commodification. It does not need to be so: Estonia is one example of a nation committed to making education its main asset in the world's capitalist economy. There could be other ways and other models for economic advancement in the current world market. Mexico, however, has chosen the path of turning education into a market-driven commodity.

## Reclaiming the public university in Wisconsin

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**ABSTRACT:** This commentary discusses the shift to austerity in the University of Wisconsin System, in the context of Wisconsin's urban, public doctoral research university in the city of Milwaukee. Critical discourses based on "the Wisconsin Idea" insist upon the necessity for both academic freedom and public support to higher education.

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In May 2016, a month or so after we issued invitations to participate in this collection of commentaries on anthropology in/of the neoliberal academy, faculty members across the University of Wisconsin System stepped forward to contest recent state reforms of public higher education. Four years after the controversial 2011 Wisconsin Act 10 removed the right of unionized collective bargaining and significantly reduced job benefits for most public employees including faculty, the state passed draconian budget cuts to higher education for the 2015-2017 biennium, while simultaneously removing principles of academic freedom that had been enshrined in state law for a century. Once it became clear that political appointees on the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents had failed to protect the primacy of tenure and shared governance as mechanisms ensuring that program decisions would be made on the grounds of academic concerns, rather than economic interests, symbolic statements of "no confidence" passed Faculty Senates first at the flagship campus in Madison, and then at several other campuses. At the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, the state's only urban, public, doctoral research institution, a full faculty meeting was called to discuss the resolution. It was the first full faculty quorum in two decades.

The May 10<sup>th</sup> meeting at UW-Milwaukee was organized by the elected University Committee, in collaboration with local leadership of the American Association of University Professionals and the American Federation of Teachers. While neither of the latter associations have authority to represent faculty in collective bargaining, the colleagues and graduate students working with them have volunteered their energy to help guide and coordinate faculty responses to changes in state higher education policy. So many faculty answered the call to lift their voices that the 124 members required for quorum was quickly established, and the 175-seat auditorium was filled far beyond capacity, with standing room only. News media reported there were nearly 300 faculty,

close to 40% of all Assistant, Associate and Full Professors on campus. The Secretary of the University was hunting for a room with more capacity when participants insisted on calling the meeting to order immediately. The Chancellor gave the floor to Rachel Ida Buff, President of the UWM AAUP chapter established in fall 2015. She made these remarks:

Colleagues,

We gather here today as bearers of a sacred trust. As stewards of the University of Wisconsin, we are the keepers of the Wisconsin idea: that crucial, democratic notion that the “beneficent influence of the University (should) reach every home in the state”... The Wisconsin Idea promotes educational democracy: the university is funded by and serves the public... But in the past eighteen months, our ability to carry out our stewardship of the Wisconsin Idea has been impaired by a legislative assault on shared governance and academic freedom. This political assault has been accompanied by unprecedented fiscal cuts, impairing our ability to educate and serve our students... By voting no confidence we protest the intentional destruction of our internationally recognized university system... (AAUP/UWM 2016).

Faculty members took turns reading paragraphs of the resolution from the floor. When fire marshals advised the Chancellor to move the crowd to another venue, the question was called without discussion and the resolution of “no confidence” passed unanimously. The resounding consensus filled the room in a voice vote. Following a year of many contentious governance meetings, budget forums, media chatter and constant worry, this moment of absolute, unified clarity brought tears to my eyes. One week later, the UW-Milwaukee Academic Staff Senate also gathered to enact its own “no confidence” resolution. It was the first and only staff body in the system to do so.

What inspired these historic precedents? Why does the “Wisconsin Idea”, a vision defined by progressives of the early twentieth century, continue to have so much resonance? When early drafts of the 2015 state budget tried to alter UWS Ch. 36, the University of Wisconsin System mission statement, removing «to serve and stimulate society», «to educate people and improve the human condition», and «the search for truth», while substituting the mission «to meet the state workforce needs» (Kertscher 2015), there was vehement public criticism. The “Wisconsin Idea” embodied in the UWS mission statement affirms higher education as a cornerstone of distributed prosperity (cf. McCarthy 1912). As wealth and income disparities in America reach shocking proportions today, this is an idea worth standing for.

Both the downtrend in overall public funding to higher education, and the rising inequalities between flagships and secondary campuses reflect a broader pattern emerging in the United States. Since the recession of 2008, state funding to public university systems fell by an average of 20%, while tuition and fees increased by an average of 29%, far outpacing the growth of median household income (Mitchell, Leachman 2015). Commentators note that flagship campuses cater increasingly to the economic elite, while student debt associated with the cost of education has become debilitating for those from modest backgrounds (see Goldrick-Rab 2014; Goldberg 2015; Hiltzik

2015; Konzcal 2015). In this context, talking about the vital legacy of the “Wisconsin Idea” unmaskes economic austerity as an ideology that naturalizes racism and social inequality in higher education.

Structural disparities between campuses within public university systems impact the quality of access to education for minority and first-generation students, just as disparities in funding across fields may impact what they are able to study. Federal initiatives favouring STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) have already transformed the academic landscape. The liberal arts are particularly at risk, as austerity discourses in several states have targeted subjects including Gender Studies, Philosophy, French literature and Anthropology as areas of learning and research that should not be “subsidized” in public institutions. In Wisconsin, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos openly touted the agenda behind the Walker administration policy reforms when he said, «Of course I want research, but I want to have research done in a way that focuses on growing our economy, not on ancient mating habits of whatever» (in Johnson 2014). Recent state legislation makes it possible for university administrators to cut faculty and programs based on financial assessments and priorities.

Historically, the University of Wisconsin System has been celebrated for a much broader vision of research and academic freedom (Hansen 1998). This tradition is lately a target for the scorn of conservatives, who typically contend that universities are bastions of liberalism. Yet both major political parties in the U.S. contribute to the tide of rhetoric and reform that is changing America’s public universities from the inside out. Wisconsin’s “liberal” state representative, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin, helped lead the “Manufacturing Universities” bill passed in June 2016. This bill «authorizes the Department of Defense to support industry-relevant, manufacturing-focused, engineering training at U.S. universities» (Baldwin 2016). A press release explains, «Institutions would be selected through a competitive grant-based process and would be required to better align their educational offerings with the needs of modern U.S. manufacturers» (*ivi*).

Urban research universities like UW-Milwaukee represent a fount of creativity and innovation, but also a necessary space for building social tolerance, critical thinking and democratic participation. These shared benefits are threatened when academics are belittled, subject offerings narrowed, and the students reduced to a mere “workforce”, effectively enslaved to the business sector. When faculty and staff challenge this by defending the Wisconsin Idea, they seek to reclaim the university as a public resource: not only a viable means of social mobility, but also a way to expand knowledge, speak truth to power, and strive for common good. This is ultimately about why our academic fields matter in the world, what we do for others, and what kind of work we will be able to do in the future.

Anthropologists have long recognized that our fieldwork is inherently tangled up with social, economic and political relations of power; we cannot ignore that our academic lives are unmistakably caught up in these relations too. We are well prepared to



grasp how neoliberal logics and audit cultures grow variously entangled with specific contexts and institutional practices. As we bring ethnographic methods and critical analysis to bear on our own experiences as university professionals, anthropologists can help understand the transformations taking place in higher education, and learn to shape them.

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## **Do not become an idiot: A comment on neoliberalism and labour relationships within higher education**

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**ABSTRACT:** As neoliberalism takes over academia, there is struggle going on. This is a struggle to keep the academic institutions as free as possible from “idiotic” (i.e. self-interested) forms of behaviour and especially from reproducing socially and politically such practices.

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When Bologna Process was initiated by the European governments promoting the neoliberal adjustment of academic sector in the continent, the focus of the protests that took place back then was the creation of the so-called university/super-market<sup>1</sup>. The critique was that under the new paradigm the students will become consumers of the educational product and the corporations or the State will be the consumers of the research product. Moreover, these protests were also focusing on the wider social shift that neoliberal higher education implies. Namely higher education was not considered anymore a right of the society or a public good, but a luxury commodity requesting individual investment. People will buy education if they can afford it and this will be translated into higher income or personal development, and listed learning outcomes, which will be translated into analogous listed skills etc. However, an area which was not stressed enough by the protests was the shift that neoliberalism will bring to the labour relationships within academia.

This happened for a number of reasons. One of these reasons has, arguably, to do with the depoliticisation of academia. The majority of the workers in European academia did not participate that actively in those protests, on contrary to their students who revolted properly in some cases against the proposed shifts over the last two decades. Certainly, one can argue that since the 1990s there was a more general depoliticisation tendency in Europe. In our case, part of the problem was that academics at that time considered themselves a different class than other workers, and unfortunately some still do so. Many academics seem to think that they are immune to the material conditions of everyday life. Of course the fact that a proportion of the academics had decent salaries and decent working conditions in most of Europe contributed to that relative lack of protest. This is not the case anymore as academia becomes an increas-

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1. A version of this text was presented in the invited plenary session of IUAES in May 2016 on the Future of Anthropology. I should thank Noel Salazar, Heather O’Leary and Rajko Mursic for putting together this session and the participants for their questions and comments. I also have to thank KULA the Slovenian Anthropological Association for hosting me.

ingly repressive work environment, both in terms of salaries and also in terms of social and political deregulation (see Bal, Grassiani, Kirk 2014; Mitchell, Dyck 2014; Afonso 2013; Dalakoglou 2012).

Today any newcomer in academia knows very well how neoliberalism is implemented in terms of labour relationships. Constant restructuring has deregulated the sector and put it in a permanent crisis, and thus a “state of exception”, which becomes the new technology of academic governance. However, one should separate two major dimensions: an institutional structure (e.g. proliferation of temporary contracts, redundancies, restructuring etc.) and the social one, consisting of people who are eager to implement or simply remain silent about such shifts. These human resources seem to be a key dimension of neoliberalism within academia and it is an issue that it is rarely addressed. It is a no-go zone since everyone working within the sector knows someone who has been involved in such activities. For instance one hears stories all the time about certain line managers who become the heavies of the neoliberal central management, or management teams who interchange between good cop-bad cop roles, we also hear cases about managers who blackmail psychologically or directly people who are below them in the academic food chain or about libel campaigns that are damaging not only within the particular institution but in smaller disciplines, they may make someone unemployed for ever. Quite often such practices are applied by certain bosses in order to make an example and intimidate the rest of the workers.

Part of the problem is that a lot of academic environments that adopt the neoliberal adjustments seem to borrow the worst elements from both worlds. So often, university environments keep the archaic and useless hierarchical structures of academia that go back to the Christian monastic punitive tradition, combined with informality and interpersonal face to face relationships and the dog-eat-dog of the neoliberal legacy. Overall, the problem with neoliberal governance of labour, within academia, is that it allows for abuse of power and bullying.

Nevertheless, the important issue is always the individuals who are eager to apply such practices in the everyday life of academic biotopes. The stories are repeated. Everyone knows of colleagues who exchange a promotion for a managerial role, for example, but they also happen to jump the fence overnight, finding themselves sitting comfortably on the side of neoliberal micro-management. Suddenly every senseless morosity that an external consultant of the central management wrote in a report (and the management now has to implement, since they paid the consultant 22 lecturers' salaries for a month's worth of work) is somehow justified by some of these former colleagues. The big university bosses who implement the worst neoliberal agendas, are portrayed by these former colleagues/now micro-line-managers as sympathetic parents who really have good intentions, but their hands are tied. If someone dares to say anything about e.g. the half million salaries of these big bosses and the junior faculty's salaries that are not enough even to pay their rent, they are automatically black-listed as a troublemaker who must be isolated and ousted by all means available by the certain

micro-bosses. After all, we are in a crisis and every exception can be justified in order to “save the discipline” or “the department” or even “social sciences” *per se*<sup>2</sup>.

So the point is that such regimes of everyday bullying within the academic work environments must be actually applied by some people, and not resisted by others, in order for the neoliberal form of governance of labour to be materialised. These two kinds of people are the necessary idiots. And idiot-ness is what distinct someone who will get a position of power and will become a bully and someone who will not. As it is well known, the word idiot is etymologically linked with the word for private. Idiot therefore refers, more or less, to persons who care about their private interests rather than the wider good. It got its negative connotations thousands of years ago in Athens, when not caring about what was defined as the collective interests of the time and the public sphere was considered as one of the worst practices. Indeed, a problem with idiots who are involved in education is that they have a role in the production of knowledge and thus social reproduction. Unfortunately, gradually one can observe an increase in similar neoliberal idiotic ethics being reproduced in very junior levels. So for instance, we see PhD students who receive their PhDs and jump the fence. Now they must take care of their career and not protest too much, whilst stepping on the neck of someone else for professional progress is justified for X or Y reasons. One also witnesses PhD students who align themselves with certain powerful individuals who love power and are higher on the academic food-chain like that aforementioned type of idiots etc.

Thus we are running always the danger to reproduce entire cohorts of idiots, as students learn not only from what their teachers say but also from the ways they behave. This is a key dimension within the neoliberal academic world, as the system is being adjusted structurally in order to produce idiots. So it is almost entirely up to the groups of teachers how to navigate within the new paradigm so they do not become idiots themselves and their students learn how not to be idiots.

So it is of crucial importance to reproduce – from the most junior to the most senior levels – as few idiots as possible. Otherwise, they will take over one of the very last spheres of public life where there is some chance to reproduce socially and politically critical forms of behaviour and thought.

One can claim that self-interested practices were always present within academia before the shift to neoliberalism. Hierarchy, authoritarianism and bravado up have been, to a certain extent, historically embedded within academic world. However there is a qualitative difference in the age of neoliberalism. The system never before favoured so much the idiots (always per the original etymology referring to private self-interest oriented behaviour). And idiot-ness becomes a distinctive factor between the people who will be able to resist the repressive neoliberal adjustments in their daily practice within the university – irrelevant of their position within the hierarchy – and the ones who will turn into bullies as soon as they catch a position of power.

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2. All cases used in this paper are random examples; any potential resemblance with real persons and real situations is accidental.

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## An anthropologist in parallel structure

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**ABSTRACT:** The essay examines the parallels between Molé Liston's studies on labor and precarity in Italy and the United States' anthropology job market. Probing the way economic shift reshaped the field of anthropology of Europe in the late 2000s, the piece explores how the neoliberalization of the American academy increased the value in studying the hardships and daily lives of non-western populations in Europe.

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Anthropologists often wonder how the kind of research they pursue reflects their own deeper and, predictably, their culturally and historically particular anxieties and aspirations. When, back in 2003, I began studying psychological workplace harassment in Italy, known as mobbing (*il mobbing*), I often attributed my fascination with corporate culture to my deep desire to remain external to it. I would joke that the cubicles, computers, glass tables, and half-hearted picture-frame-and-mug adorned workstations were just as exotic as the highly exoticized subjects of classic anthropology: fishing boats and huts, shell currencies, coming-of-age rituals, and tribal leaders. I would also grinningly add that I wished to remain just as much as an outsider to modern office life as earlier anthropologists were to small-scale tribal societies. But, of course, the joke was a simplification, perhaps even a fantasy. Just as early 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists were embedded in the same imperial capitalist economics that made non-western others appear foreign, so too was I, an aspiring American academic, embedded in the same neoliberal economic transformation and precarity that I had argued underpinned the rise of mobbing in Italy. In fact, as graduate student examining the growing number of semi-permanent contracts, I was myself indexed as a member of Italy's precariously employed and regularly offered what one offered to sympathetic collaborators in Italy at the time: promises of semi-permanent contracts.

As part of an academic writing workshop at Rutgers University, a fellowship I held as I completed my dissertation, a colleague recommended I apply for a position at the Princeton Writing Program. She, much like my kind collaborators in Italy, engaged in this increasingly commonplace trade in semi-permanent contracts. And the information alone was an extremely valuable part of this new currency, especially as multi-year post-doctoral positions for anthropology were rare and far more desirable than one-year or adjunct positions. The five-year position at Princeton University appeared ideal: full-time Lecturers teach two 12-student courses per semester. The writing seminar would



be designed by the instructor, shaped by one's academic interests, infused with a rigorous writing curriculum, and handsomely scaffolded through faculty development. I taught seminars such as *Health and Illness in Cultural Context* and *Culture and the Body* so my courses provided an intellectually and professionally satisfying way to introduce undergraduates to anthropology.

I began at Princeton in 2007 and, soon, the Great Recession of 2008 would dominate discourse surrounding open academic positions in anthropology. At the time, I was polishing my argument that mobbing became a way social actors navigated a massive economic and occupational structural shift in Italy: the new mobbing industry of clinics, diagnoses, and programs harnessed public attention to something more tangible and localized than Italy's vast and diffuse neoliberal transformation (Molé 2012). During the global recession, I noticed that my colleagues and mentors rarely spoke of the American academy's structural transformation. Instead many, especially admired elders in the field, imagined the anthropology tenure-track job market as only temporarily stymied and still overwhelmingly merit-based. Over the years I accumulated my own job market scars, I found this narrative increasingly problematic and erroneous. The myth of temporary scarcity has been a resistant neoliberal trope, especially when tenure lines have been replaced with non-tenure and semi-permanent or part-time positions, amounting to upwards of a 40 percent loss in full-time and tenure track positions (Kendzior 2014). While I wrote my manuscript on mobbing, I argued that mobbing emerged, in part, because of a two-tier workplace, split between lifelong workers, who held airtight protected contracts, and precarious workers, who held an array of newly legalized semi-permanent contracts. In the field of anthropology in the late 2000s, a similar split became increasingly pronounced between tenured and tenure-aspiring academics. With it we saw a steep ratcheting up of academic credentials one needed to jump tiers and theories verging on the conspiratorial on how to do so. By 2009, I found myself haphazardly valued by top-ranked anthropology departments, simultaneously planning campus visits and going entirely unnoticed, and that was with a book contract and several journal publications.

I also witnessed a very particular kind of anthropological baggage re-emerge: as neoliberalism reshaped the qualities of tenure-track anthropologists, we saw a renewed valuation of research on non-western people and places. Anthropology of Europe had blossomed slowly in the 1980s, became a serious subfield in the 1990s, but by the 2000s, I would argue, anthropology has experienced a reinvigoration of orientalism.

. The valued work became less about Europeans than about those who could be indexed as "others" in Europe, and Europe was almost never the desired geographic region for new positions. In the United States, one could argue that anthropologists specializing in Europe never enjoyed top visibility and desirability in the discipline. But this trend was more nuanced. We might see it as the continuation of early exotification in the anthropology of Europe in which scholars replicated studies of non-western

areas of interest: ritual and magic, patriarchal lineage, kinship, pastoral practice and land cultivation. We might also wonder whether this shift was in tandem with what Joel Robbins (2013) has famously called the “suffering slot” problem, that is, replacing our discipline’s fixation with the non-western “exotic” other with the suffering other and the humanitarian gaze. It follows that it became more academically desirable to study trafficking and immigration of non-European subjects to and within Europe, than it was to study, say, the plight of underemployed Italians. I can attest, at least anecdotally, that many tenure-line success stories and prominent book contracts followed this trend. I have also had mentors, themselves experts in the field of anthropology of Europe, suggest that my only job survival strategy would be to shift my research focus from Italians to foreign nationals living – or, preferably, struggling – in Italy. But why would the corporatization of the university reshape the anthropology of Europe in this way?

As a discipline, we take seriously that the hegemonic notion of “the market” shapes the production of knowledge. What we might call the imagined currency of research topics – especially since aspiring young academics regularly speculated on the wants of the anthropology market – is its understudied feature.

As new PhDs became embedded within precarious and ever-tightening labor structures, many of them refashioned their own research “brands” accordingly. The discipline also seems to stubbornly validate and laud fieldwork that is difficult, physically or psychologically. While Robbins’ suffering slot theory implies emotionally taxing labor by the ethnographer, we are also seeing the imperial relics in the self-aggrandizing heroism of challenging non-western and non-urban fieldwork, which also tends to be historically masculinized. Indeed the common jokes when I discussed my research in Italy were either mock curiosity, “Italians actually work?” or the highly sarcastic: “Fieldwork in Italy must have been really tough”. Both reveal this persistent privileging of bodily or mentally taxing fieldwork, which would not only imply non-European fieldsites or harsh-living sites within Europe, but also count them as more rigorous, more valid, and somehow more authentically ethnographic. We might also link this shift towards the new realities of austerity in academe as departments seek to populate introductory courses with traditional anthropological topics and geographic areas.

Along these lines, the act of staying in writing programs, and as a full-time non-tenure track faculty member, has allowed me an unforeseen advantage in intellectual self-determination. I began as a Senior Lecturer at the New York University’s Expository Writing Program in 2012 after my five-year position at Princeton ended and I was tiring of near-misses pursuing tenure stream positions. Structurally speaking, continuing contract full-time faculty members, as we are called, are judged less on research than on teaching for promotion and reappointment. With the relief of having a continuing full-time academic position, I was able to make decisions about my research without trying to position my scholarship to fit some kind of imagined market desirability for anthropology. In the past four years I have developed a project on scientific skepticism in the context of theatrical and mediatized politics in Italy. I am interested in how

the Berlusconi age of partial and fabricated truths shape how Italians trust and distrust scientific knowledge. To what extent do social actors embrace science when, culturally speaking, truths seem more fabricated than factual? The project covers Italian scientific activists who protest magic and superstition and the famous “trial against science” (*processo alla scienza*) in L’Aquila, which held Risk Commission members accountable for earthquake victims’ deaths after they issued public safety reassurances. In the future, we might begin to more deliberately track how anthropological research diverges along the two tiers within the anthropology of Europe. We certainly won’t see all underemployed anthropologists conduct off-hot-topic work because the allure of the supposedly meritocratic tenure line remains strong, and, of course, some projects already fit the trends without recourse to disciplinary “market” demands.

My research continues to investigate the question of how large-scale structural change and knowledge shapes embodied experience and belief. In another sense, I am still investigating precarity; only in this case it is a kind of massive epistemological precarity, which shapes who we trust and how we gauge our everyday and future decisions. If the neoliberal academy’s ethos is precarity, and uncertainty its trade, then my research and occupational life continue on parallel tracks.

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## Teaching in crisis: Anthropology under structural adjustment

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper I want to address the pressure of structural adjustment policies on teaching and learning anthropology. I will base my thoughts on the Spanish case but the reflexion is applicable to many other countries in Europe. The decline in public funding and the increase in fees have transformed the meaning of higher education. Increasingly, productivity criteria and ranking measures become the guides to university investments and social valorisation of competing disciplines in the public eye.

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### *A Short story*

For several of the Southern European countries that are now subject to structural adjustment policies (Portugal, Greece, Spain) the 1980s and 1990s appeared as the promise of democracy and increased entitlement and access to basic rights such as education and health after long spells of autocratic and dictatorial regimes<sup>1</sup>. In Spain, while compulsory education was extended to 14 and then 16 years old (allegedly also to keep young people away from the labour market and unemployment rates under control), access to higher education became the real symbolic marker of change. The number of students enrolled in higher education increased by 240% from 1979 to 1999. Access to education in general and to higher education in particular (that had been the preserve of political and economic elites) symbolized social mobility. It was also a sign of democratization expressing the political enfranchisement of the masses. Education paved the way to freedom and prevented political manipulation: it was the mark of the fully able and responsible citizen, the political citizen. Therefore public education, as necessary to democracy, was a political project and the responsibility of a democratic state.

In Spain, the rise of anthropology as a discipline investigating social relations and cultural practices in the contemporary world (as different from folklore studies, philosophical anthropology and theology, and the colonial history of America) was strongly tied to this political moment of the fight for and the transition to democracy.

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1. A first version of this paper was presented as a keynote lecture at the "Teaching Amidst Change" Conference, 5-6 September 2013, Department of Education, University of Oxford, UK. I want to thank the organizers Jakob Krause-Jensen, David Mills and Didi Spencer for their invitation, and all the participants for their comments and presentations.

### *Teaching in crisis*

The neo-liberal restructuring of higher education, under way since the 1980s in the UK, has resulted in a series of measures that have changed the meaning of the university. Rather than a place of learning it is now an enterprise producing a commodity, namely a degree with value in the labour market. The idea that the university is an environment where knowledge is collectively being created for the common good is sidelined. In its place, the accumulation of objectified knowledge assets prevails.

Technocratic arguments have supported the restructuring of the university system underscoring financial sustainability to the detriment of any other argument. Neoliberal objectives lurk under a seemingly neutral, non-ideological and a-political technocratic rationale. Indeed, restructuring in higher education (as in other structural adjustment projects) was couched in the “crisis argument”: in financial terms the public higher education enterprise was in permanent deficit. Costs were high and benefits low. Benefits, however, were difficult to measure because they included not only strictly financial returns to the enterprise itself, but also returns accrued to the bearers of the resulting human capital, measured in terms of employability and wage differential. In a new era of universities’ financial autonomy and rolling back of public subsidies to higher education, an increase in productivity meant lower costs and higher profits: staff reorganization and high student fees. But in university, as in other paid care services such as health care, it is almost impossible to increase staff productivity without negatively affecting quality: productivity gains through staff cuts and precarization result in lower-quality input in a creative process that requires intensive interaction between teachers and students and the building of a *caring* relationship.

The transformation of university from a public good into a market oriented service producing tradable commodities has had another important effect. University degrees are valued as credential assets, in terms of employment security and the future income expectations they provide for their holders. This perspective on higher education is not new. It is linked to the concept of “human capital” and the self-entrepreneurial individual, rendered directly responsible for his or her own success in life. The “human capital” idea transforms knowledge into an individual asset instead of a collaborative process, and transforms education into an investment. As an investment, then, it should secure and maintain its value into the future and it should also increase it. But investments are risky and the future is unknown in a truly secular culture. Therefore students speculate over the future marketability of the degrees often choosing a discipline not because they are interested in it but because they think it will be in demand in the future labor market. Hence an increasingly instrumental understanding of knowledge and learning albeit in a extremely volatile environment that renders investments highly risky.

Higher education used to be a collective process of knowledge production and transmission, where research and teaching nurtured each other. Now the university has been transformed into a provider of commodified degrees, hence at a price and under

market conditions of supply and demand. Significantly, the attitude towards university education is being transformed. Instead of an entitlement and part of a persons' transformation into a responsible citizen, it becomes a consumption item, an investment, an asset of human capital. From being a political good, it becomes an economic asset. Final objectives, then, are entirely different and operate in a different cultural environment.

This transformation has had two consequences. On the one hand, fees have increased out of pace with ordinary incomes in most places, arguably in relation to demand (better universities or degrees can charge more because they deliver better prospects of employability and future income). In countries such as Spain, the sudden raise in university fees in the last couple of years has resulted in a high number of dropouts related to economic reasons<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the Bologna restructuring of the university has reorganized curricula in such a way that it is very difficult to be a part-time student and work on the side. At the same time fellowships are being cut. Consequently, university will again become a privilege instead of an entitlement.

On the other hand, certain degrees have been defined as overvalued or non-marketable because they do not increase employment and income prospects. Courses, degrees, disciplines, with low demand are disappearing in a market driven environment. In Spain, university bylaws are being modified so that degrees with an enrollment under 40 new students a year are considered unviable and forced to disappear. An alternative proposition is that they become extremely expensive. As a councilor of the Catalan government said recently: "Those who want to study Latin... let them pay for it".

### *Teaching anthropology*

Within this general "crisis" argument that serves to justify deep transformations in higher education all over Europe: What is happening in Anthropology? I will speak of social anthropology and of the situation in Spain. As a Social Science and Humanities discipline social anthropology is at risk and is pushed to demonstrate its relevance for "society" (often used as a substitute for "the market"). Mostly it is required to define its professional niche: what is it that anthropologists really do? What are their abilities and capacities? How do they contribute to economic growth? While it seems to most of us pretty obvious that research based in the ethnographic and comparative methods can offer important knowledge for policy, it is also clear that its critical edge is potentially disturbing. Knowledge about how society works or doesn't work, about power fields and social relations, about the multiple strategies and practices that defy or uphold institutions, about expectation and frustration, about forms of violence and forms of care, and about producing meaningful difference... is a potentially dangerous knowledge for the establishment. Anthropology teaches and learns from crises.

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2. In the 2012-2013 academic period some 30,000 students have been unable to pay their full fees and have been threatened with expulsion (*El País*, 27-08-2013).



Because ideas and practices on how to produce and enhance wellbeing are not homogeneously shared across society, knowledge about society can support many kinds of action and forms of engagement, but also, this knowledge is produced from a situated position that informs observation and theory. It is never neutral and is at pains to present a “technocratic” appearance. It is always engaged, always a continuation of our political positioning by other means. Thus, against the neo-liberal trend in higher education that stresses neutral forms of vocational training responding to labor market demand, anthropology is always political (although not always in the same way). Anthropology is at risk of disappearing as a proper discipline because the knowledge it provides can only become co-opted into mainstream economic objectives by being fragmented, disembedded and often distorted. Different sub-fields within anthropology used to be thought of as a mere analytical tool within a holistic arena that explored real life complexity. Now, instead, these analytical fields (increasingly fragmented) are competing against each other as commodities in a market trying to seduce individual customers. And this is a real danger to what makes anthropology’s specificity.

The crisis, or the argument of the crisis as an instrument for the privatization of higher education, has made an important impact in anthropology. The changes it has brought about are an obstacle to the collective enterprise of learning through teaching and research that are vital for anthropology. Anthropological knowledge is unique because it is produced through the ongoing debate of hypotheses during the fieldwork experience, the tension of diverse forms of knowledge, of different manners of distancing and categorizing in order to “make sense” of experienced reality. Anthropology is about learning from others and learning with others through engaged reflexivity. This is the only way Anthropology can exist as a science and be taught.

So the question is can we keep building this collective knowledge in the new environment of induced crisis in higher education?

## Anthropology for whom? Engaging students in the neoliberal academy

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**ABSTRACT:** The article analyzes students' engagement in the neoliberal academy. It points to a paradox: while academic institutions set out to produce engaged and motivated students and instil in them a quest for knowledge, their increasingly high tuition fees are creating instead a disengaged student population whose main goal is to pay off accumulated debts.

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Most anthropologists probably share Shore and Wright's view (2000: 57) that the rise of technologies of audit and accountability engender «new norms of conduct and professional behaviour» and create «new kinds of subjectivities». A lot has been written, in Anthropology and cognate disciplines, on the rise of audit culture after the neoliberal turn, and I do not think my thoughts will add anything new to what is already well known. However, I would like to contribute to the debate by asking a question: if audit technologies set out to create self-managing individuals who render themselves auditable, as Shore and Wright suggest, what kind of students does the auditable academy produce?

A few years ago, Gusterson (2011) shared his views on the consumer mentality and commodity logic that have become dominant among students in Anglophone universities on both sides of the Atlantic and reminded us that our task, as academics, is not simply the production of knowledge (in the form of publications, for example): we also have to communicate it to an audience which includes, *inter alia*, undergraduate students. At a time when a lot of pressure is put on academics to publish books and articles in refereed journals, teaching seems the least important task. Yet not all academic institutions are research-intensive, and the survival of many departments is conditional on sufficient student enrollments. An anthropologist who has published articles in prestigious journals or has put forward a fascinating theory, for example, cannot expect high enrollments if students find his/her language difficult, or if his/her expectations are higher than other colleagues. I am not denying that there are committed and hard-working students who have a different attitude towards university studies. However, it seems clear that ensuring sufficient enrollments poses a few problems, and I will discuss some of them.

During my career as an academic I have become familiar with different academic systems. I completed my first university degree in Italy, and subsequently moved to Britain to pursue my doctoral studies in Social Anthropology. After completion of my

PhD, I was elected into temporary teaching and research positions in England and Wales. I subsequently crossed the Atlantic and worked in universities in the Canadian provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. I recently moved to Memorial University of Newfoundland, to which I am currently affiliated. Obviously different universities have different systems, yet while most value research, they also place increasing emphasis on “learning” and “student success”. These are highlighted by their mission statements (which I quote anonymously): «to provide the environment and support to ensure (the students’) success»; «to instil in (students) a lifelong quest for knowledge and understanding»; «to provide students with a transformative, academically rigorous personal learning experience»; and so forth. One way in which knowledge is instilled and a learning experience is provided is through “engagement”. Engagement may take different forms, yet at the level of practice engaging students usually entails stimulating their interest in the subjects taught and establishing a relationship between such subjects and the “real world”. Thus, more and more universities run seminars and symposia on how to make students more engaged. Engagement, in turn, has drawn the attention of the private sector too: I am often contacted by publishing companies encouraging me to adopt their newly-published textbook that has the potential to enhance students’ engagement; likewise, computer companies occasionally ask me to recommend their products to the university’s purchase department on the grounds that their adoption will foster students’ engagement. Emphasis on engagement is hardly surprising: after all, if audit technologies (like course evaluations, for example) set out to improve the quality of teaching, improved teaching techniques will likely produce engaged and motivated students. But how “engaged” are students in the neoliberal academy?

One thing I have always found difficult to assess is students’ engagement itself. Until quite recently I assumed that students’ questions on the subjects examined in class and their participation in discussions were evidence of engagement. Moreover, because of its focus on the “real world”, Anthropology can play a significant role in stimulating students’ interest. In theory this is true. Yet in practice engagement becomes a problem if students need to work as a result of the high tuition fees that many universities charge. While a few years ago most students used to study and work, nowadays they work and study. Thus, a full-time job means a very limited amount of time to be devoted to study. This situation brings to mind what Gusterson (2011) wrote not long ago: because losing a job is not an option, students skip the readings for a class in order to be able to show up for work. There is little doubt that some students know how to balance work and study, and this skill is reflected in their final grades. However, these are a minority: most of those who have recently attended my classes, for instance, told me very honestly that succeeding in exams is a matter of luck. They always hope to be tested on their lecture notes only, and know that questions on the assigned readings are likely to result in mediocre or low marks. Yet getting not-so-good marks is preferable to being fired.

The stress and anxiety stemming from the attempt to balance work and study are revealed particularly by the e-mails some students send me the night before a test. Most of these ask on what materials they should focus, whether it is necessary to remember dates or definitions, and the like. Others ask whether the ethnographic video shown in class or the article on reserve in the library may be found online. There is nothing wrong with these questions. Yet they show that preparation for a test is usually left for the last minute, and that very little, if anything, of what has been learned is likely to be retained. In a recent class, I encouraged a student to contribute to discussions and summarize the points she had made in her presentation a few days before, and she replied that she could not even remember what the presentation was about. This is an extreme case, but it is an indicator of the “disengaging” effect of high tuition fees, and reveals that for an increasing number of students the main goal of studying is to pass a test.

Engagement becomes even more problematic at a time when an increasing number of students make use of mobile electronic devices with access to the Internet. Nobody can deny that these are very useful tools: after all, a visit to the university library involves time and money to be spent on photocopies, and a little device can save both. However, easy access to sources can have perverse effects like, for example, excessive dependency on electronic devices. Convincing students to visit the university library to find sources for a research paper has become a challenging task, given that retrieving academic articles from databases is deemed much easier and faster. This is not laziness, but pure economic calculation: the time spent in a library is time taken off work, and the more time, the longer it will take to pay off one’s debts. Gone are the days when students used to come to my office to ask for advice as to what books they should read during the summer. Nowadays I am more likely to hear about the summer jobs for which they plan to apply. The “job”, in turn, is no longer the means to pay off debts: it has become an end in itself.

As a result of these changes, campus is becoming less important as a context of socialization and exchange of ideas among students, and the increasing popularity of online courses may have “desocializing” effects. Shortly before the winter semester came to an end, I was asked by some students who took one of my courses for the notes of the lectures they had not been able to attend. I drew their attention to the course description, and reminded them that it is their responsibility to get such notes from other students. They, in turn, gave the same reply: that they do not know the other students. This reply reminded me of an important thing, namely, that one of our tasks, as anthropologists, is to make students familiar with cultures and societies (broadly defined). But how can students become “engaged” and learn about something called “society” if they cannot (or do not want to) relate to others attending the same small class? Welcome to the neoliberal university.

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## Graduate education and training in the neoliberal university

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay explores the impacts of neoliberal policies on graduate education, focusing attention on issues of curriculum, decision-making, and the role of graduate students at the university.

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Before beginning this essay, it is perhaps important to know who I am, or at least what role I fulfill at the university. I work in the Graduate School as a faculty member charged with enhancing our efforts at interdisciplinary and innovative education. In many ways, I am a perfect example of what neoliberalism has wrought. I am a mid-level administrator in a position that many might lump into the category of “administrative bloat”. I spend much of my time assisting faculty as they write proposals for new programs. This involves encouraging them to think about whom their new program will attract, how their new graduates will serve the workforce of the state and the nation, and what their economic impact will be. At the same time, I encourage them to become entrepreneurial; new programs are all but obliged to apply for training grants, to apply to foundations, or to otherwise secure the means to fund their graduate students.

I do not do those things because I think it will help these faculty better meet their pedagogical goals, but rather because it will help them get their programs approved and their graduate students fed. Demand, placement, and economic service to the state are what drives program approval decisions, so much more so than ideals of advancing science, lifting culture, pushing boundaries, and training insightful and critical thinkers; and, state funds for higher education, particularly graduate education, are never sufficient.

At the same time, I also have elements in common with the academic precariat. I am in a non-tenure-track faculty position, and my contract is reviewed and renewed on a year-to-year basis. In addition to not feeling I have the security to openly critique structures or policies I believe are problematic, the need to continually rejustify my existence forces me to carefully document the ways in which I contribute to the university, particularly in how I help increase our offerings, our training grants, and the quantity and quality of graduate students. This necessarily takes time and energy away from my ability to serve those students and to think creatively about training programs that advance knowledge and create passionate and curious people.



Much has been written on the impact on higher education of the policies and practices inspired by neoliberal ideologies and discourses. And much is quite damning (see for example, Giroux 2010). Cuts in state funding to public institutions, the extension of economic rationalities to universities, and the redefinition of individuals from citizens to economic actors has pushed universities to focus on revenue generation, economic efficiency, branding, and extrinsic outcomes (Saunders 2010). These conditions in turn have led to the undermining of tenure, the increased use of contingent faculty, and increasingly hierarchical modes of university governance (Saunders 2010).

What is missing from those accounts, though, is an on-the-ground view of their effects on faculty, students, and the institution. What I try to do here is to provide that and to focus attention a bit more on those issues that are specific to, or at least particularly relevant for, graduate education and training. This focus on graduate students is necessary because they face a different set of conditions, opportunities, and constraints than do undergraduates, and yet at many institutions, mine included, they lack visibility. This may manifest in subtle ways, such as graduate students being absent from the University President's annual letter bragging on the qualifications of new students, or they may be more insidious, particularly when important decisions are made without adequate representation from graduate student interests. Recent examples at my university include the selection and initial configuration of student information and other IT systems. When the needs of graduate students and their mentors are considered after key decision points, the workarounds put in place to meet their needs can be quite cumbersome. One might argue that the focus on undergraduates is natural, given that the university is made up mostly of undergraduates, but when approximately 8,500 of our 36,000 students are graduate and professional students, they are hardly insignificant. It seems more likely that they are often overlooked because roughly half of the approximately 7,000 graduate students are on assistantship, being *paid* to attend the university, rather than paying tuition. They are, therefore, not the same kind of consumer as the undergraduate who will pour tens of thousands of dollars into the university. Graduate students become the cogs in the machine, teaching courses and laboring in labs, with their work conditioned primarily as service to undergraduates and to PIs rather than as opportunities and contexts for their own growth and development as scholars.

Economic rationalities also drive a focus on creating graduate programs that are economically efficient, that generate revenue, and that provide for the needs of capital in the state. We see this in progressive rewrites of the program proposal template (provided by the Board of Regents of the University System) to increasingly focus on job prospects for graduates, revenue impacts to the university, and potential for economic impacts in the state. Faculty are now in the business of writing business plans, estimating market shares, and forecasting demand for their product every bit as much as they are tasked with designing programs to train future scholars and citizens. At the same

time, the University has been charged with eliminating programs that are “low producing” and that are feared to use too many resources in the production of each unit. This includes eliminating the terminal master’s degrees that in many fields have provided an honorable and useful escape hatch for those who learn that doctoral education is not a good fit. These are programs that cost very little, that we prefer not be high producing, that serve students well, and that were targeted for termination nonetheless. Luckily, the Board of Regents did accept the University’s argument that these programs should remain. Other programs will not be so lucky. As has been pointed out by others (e.g. Slaughter 1993), humanities programs have long been under fire because they do not generate revenue in the same way that genetics programs do, but now they are also under attack for being smaller programs, even when that is what might make both programmatic and financial sense.

Even such mundane building blocks of graduate education as courses are under pressure from the budget models born of neoliberalism. At my institution, budgets are loosely based on credit hours, and credit hours follow the instructor of the course, flowing to the unit that pays the instructor. This actively works against the development of interdisciplinary programs, as some unit heads discourage students from taking courses outside of their departments. This focus on credit hours also makes it difficult for faculty members to co-teach courses. Even when they give full effort, they can only receive a portion of the credit. Such a funding model encourages unnecessary duplication of effort. Why would we develop a robust general training course that would serve multiple programs when each program could offer a variant of it and capture the credit hours produced by their students?

For those who write using the term neoliberalism, the results attributed to it are almost always cast as universally bad. I would like to, gently, challenge that notion. Many authors decry the “vocationalization” of training (e.g. Giroux 2010), and while I do believe that our graduate programs should focus more on creativity and inquiry, I also think it is perfectly reasonable and responsible to train students with other skills as well. Turning out graduates who can communicate and work in teams certainly serves the interests of capital, but that does not mean it does not also serve the interests of the students and society more broadly. As pertains to the research enterprise, perhaps the constant push for more grant dollars has forced creativity leading to breakthroughs in science. And perhaps the arranged marriage of arts and humanities programs with the sciences will not simply produce bland humanities in the service of STEM but rather confer benefits in expanding the horizons of both partners.

I feel acutely the tension between my roles as handmaiden of neoliberalism and critical scholar committed to the democratization of knowledge production, management, and transfer. I have not yet found a satisfactory way to resolve that tension and am not entirely content with the “change from within” model. However, a glimmer of hope came from a very unlikely place earlier this year, as International Monetary Fund

(IMF) researchers identified disturbing concerns with neoliberalism more generally (Ostry, Loungani, Furceri 2016). If even the IMF can step away from neoliberal policies, perhaps our institutions of higher education can as well.

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## Let our Profs be Profs

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**ABSTRACT:** This contribution traces the impact of research and teaching audit on university life in UK. It focuses on how the audit regimes generate an entrepreneurial subjectivity among academics, thereby transforming what it means to be a “Prof”. It argues that anthropology has a role to play in drawing attention to the significance of these transformations of subjectivity.

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On May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016, an organisation called Let Our Kids Be Kids called a national strike of primary age (5-11 years) school children in England, in protest at the increased pressures of schooling in contemporary England. The main target of the day-long strike was assessment, and particularly the so-called “SATs” tests which children take at ages 6/7 and 10/11. Ostensibly designed as audit – to test schools, rather than pupils – Let Our Kids Be Kids nevertheless argued – with the support of considerable anecdotal evidence – that children found SATs increasingly stressful, and that they were stifling creativity in the classroom, as teachers increasingly “teach to test”. More significantly, though, Let Our Kids Be Kids points towards a more general problem, of a primary education system in the grips of a stifling audit regime that threatens to generate a particular type of perverse subjectivity, at the cost of a more healthy one – of “being Kids”.

A similar audit regime prevails in the UK’s universities, where the requirements of accountability and “quality assurance” generate an equally unhealthy subjectivity among academics. The technologies of audit generate technologies of management and self-management that refashion subjectivities in alignment with the values of individualism, entrepreneurialism and market competition. Such is the nature of neoliberalism (Ganti 2014: 94). Many of us recognise in this neither the people we wanted or expected to become when we started our academic career, nor ourselves, in our activities. The challenge of the neoliberal university is that of “being a Prof”.

Since the 1980s, successive UK governments have pushed for increased accountability and marketization in higher education. Under the banner of “quality assurance”, a series of frameworks or “exercises” have been established to audit both teaching and research.

In research, this began in 1986 with the “research selectivity exercise”, which became the “research assessment exercise” (RAE) and latterly the “research excellence framework” (REF). They were initially designed to guide the allocation of general re-

search funding – the so-called QR or “quality related” funding that is not linked to particular projects. However, as QR funding decreases in real terms (Ruckenstein, Smith and Owen 2016), they are increasingly significant only to establish league tables of departments and universities, or as what some people refer to as a “beauty contest”. Research quality is measured in terms of three factors: the quality of publications, as judged by peers – but increasingly through citation and impact indices; the research environment, in which the main factor is research income from non-QR sources (foundations, research councils etc.); societal impact – this is the measurable effect that a piece of research has had upon wider society or culture.

In each case, what started out as a retrospective “stock-taking” of achievement and quality is now a driver of entrepreneurial research activity. Publications, or “outputs”, are targeted towards higher status, higher profile journals; the acquisition of research funding has become an end in itself, rather than a means to an end of generating research; and the pursuit of societal impact has become a central driver of research design, as grant applicants are now required to “plan for impact”. Not only have these drivers become commonplace, their hegemonic purchase has made them “common sense”, in Gramsci’s terms. They are seen as unquestionable: who could possibly argue against wanting to publish your work in the “best” journals, wanting to get more research funding, or wanting to maximise the societal impact of your research?

Yet we know from Kuhn (1962) that science tends to be highly normative. The highest profile is not necessarily the most innovative, with genuinely new ideas more likely to appear on the fringes. We also know that the best ideas are not necessarily those that are likely to attract funding – again because they go against norms of accepted practice or established paradigms. As Ozga (1988) has argued, entrepreneurialism in research grant acquisition has driven scholars away from «Purposeful, but wide-ranging intellectual enquiry» (147), and towards management – of research funds, of funding applications, and of donor expectations. Moreover, as I have argued (Mitchell 2014), the impact agenda favours impacts of a particular type, driving us towards research that bolsters established policy – or worse, serves as propaganda for policy (Marginson 1993). The consequence is a standardisation and homogenisation of research on the one hand, and on the other, an increasingly frantic and anxious entrepreneurialism, as scholars compete over limited resources.

In teaching, audit began in the early 1990s with “teaching quality assessment” (TQA) and “subject review”, managed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). These were initially institution-level, and subsequently subject-level reviews, involving self-evaluation, review of student evaluation, observation of teaching, and scrutiny of audit process. They were replaced in 2001 by a “lighter touch” Institutional Audit process in which universities manage their own teaching quality assurance, but have periodic visits from the QAA to audit their procedures. There are plans to replace this in 2017 with a “teaching excellence framework” (TEF).

Over the period of university teaching audit, measures of student satisfaction with teaching have become increasingly important, particularly so since the introduction of student tuition fees in 1998. Initially set at a maximum of £1,000, this was raised to £3,000 in 2004, and £9,000 in 2012, when central government removed its direct per capita funding of student tuition. This created an open market in student recruitment. To help prospective students make decisions about where to study, and to assure quality the National Student Survey was introduced in 2005. This annual survey of all final year students rates student “satisfaction” about their courses, on a range of issues including learning resources, careers guidance, feedback on work, and the quality of teaching. When the TEF is introduced, this will feed in to an overall ranking that will enable the higher-ranked institutions to charge yet higher tuition fees. For the moment, it is an important part of the published league tables that appear in the press and online, which form an important part of student recruitment.

With every undergraduate student now guaranteeing an income to the university of £27,000 over 3 years, there is considerable financial pressure to compete for every potential student both internally within universities and externally between them. With league tables and student satisfaction a significant factor in student choice, and with rising fees generating an increasingly consumer-like attitude among students who, now paying, expect “good service” and “value for money”, there is increased pressure to teach courses and modules that are not merely “interesting” or “important”, but “satisfying” and even “entertaining”. Again, the logic is in some ways unquestionable – why wouldn’t we want to provide the best possible teaching, and why wouldn’t we ask the students to make judgements about teaching quality? Yet as with research, the teaching audit regime generates a series of perverse outcomes, or drivers. In this case potentially “dumbing down” course content and presenting classes as “infotainment”. Not so much “teaching to test” as teaching to student evaluation, in order to maximise league-table scores and so better compete for students.

Evidence is starting to emerge about the levels of stress and anxiety being generated by this entrepreneurialisation of university life (Berg, Seeber 2016: 2ff). We might identify three inter-related sources of stress. First, the need to perform, to maximize, to generate outputs, income, impact and high levels of satisfaction. Second, the stress inherent in compromising principles that this generates. We are drawn towards tailoring our research interests towards those of the funders or of policy; and tailoring our teaching towards that which is satisfying. Maintaining principles in such a context can lead to contradiction and compromise. Third, there is the stress inherent in competition. Although academics have always competed – intellectually, and over jobs and resources – it is its collegiality and sense of collective endeavour that has attracted and sustained many careers – including my own – through difficult and stressful times. The neoliberal regime of audit, accountability, entrepreneurialism and competition cuts across this collegiality, producing an entrepreneurial subjectivity that is by definition competitive, rather than collegial. As a result, the very thing that holds us together is eroded.



Let Our Kids Be Kids attracted widespread media attention, and support from diverse public commentators. As I write, the University and Colleges Union (UCU), which represents academics and others in higher education, has its own campaign, involving a series of one-day strikes and a “work to contract” designed to disrupt university business. The primary grievances are an inadequate pay deal, the casualization of university contracts, and the gender pay-gap. These are all important – indeed vital – targets for action. Yet for many the focus on the specific fails to capture the more generalised grievance that not just our work and our conditions, but our very subjectivities, have been transformed.

I am not sure that a Let Our Profs Be Profs campaign would have any purchase in the public imagination. Fighting against, or to preserve, something as apparently nebulous as “subjectivity” is going to be a difficult task. Yet as anthropologists, we need to find ways to communicate this most central of messages in the anthropology of neoliberalism – that the transformation of subjectivity is not a “soft” project, but the hard edge of neoliberalism. We need to do this not just for our Kids, but also for our Profs.

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